

# HR

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■ **I view myself as a tolerant person, but I admit that I am not comfortable with text messaging as a workplace communication tool. In my view, this is a faddish thing for weekend socializing. Is this my problem? Do I just need to “get with the times?”**

**Text messaging** is getting more attention in business literature as “Generation Y” workers, who are comfortable with instant message (IM) communication, enter the workplace and find older peers or managers uncomfortable with this new technology. Being open to change is valuable, but not every new convention requires you to adapt. Although learning to text message may have some useful business applications, it is appropriate to expect employees skilled in the technique to rely upon conventional communication methods if those work best for your work group. The call to understand, adapt, change, and “get with the times” creates big stress for managers and employees alike. Some things do not change such as the need for effective relationships and good communication in order to produce good results. Every employee, whether old or young, needs to learn effective communication skills. The good news is that young people today are generally an upbeat, empowered, ambitious, and eager-to-learn group who value honesty, so you can anticipate their cooperation.

■ **One of my employees is resigning. I am glad because this person has been slow moving and under-performing for a long time. I blame myself because I adapted to the performance issues as they grew worse rather than intervene. How can I prevent this from happening in the future?**

**The easy answer** is start earlier in confronting employees with performance issues, but this answer may be too simplistic to inspire you to change. To help you act sooner, ask yourself what parts of your current job you dislike the most and if those things are related to employee performance issues. Do you dislike dealing with angry people? Do you dread meetings with your boss to discuss performance concerns? Do you work extra hours to catch up incomplete work? Are other workers angry over the leniency you’ve shown? These are only a few outcomes from this type of neglect. Some managers believe that if they can adapt to an employee’s poor performance, then nothing needs to be done about it. They forget that lower production, along with the departure of high-performing employees, are consequences of allowing poor performers to continue. The issues snowball. Talk to your employee assistance professional to learn more so you can overcome your reluctance to confront an employee’s poor job performance.

■ **My employee isn’t in-subordinate when I make a request, but**

**Although your employee** is great with a task, you are not describing superior performance. Quarrelsome behavior interferes with orderly work flow and is therefore serious. These kinds of communication patterns

there are always complaints, resistance to details, problems with timing, and criticism about my communication. After all this, the employee follows through with good work. How can I change this job performance pattern?

■ **My employee went to treatment for a drug addiction problem. I'm glad the employee is in treatment, but if this person relapses, how will I know and what should I do? Will the relapse appear as a performance issue or with physical symptoms that demonstrate drug use?**

■ **The issue of bullying has come up several times recently, and there has been discussion about developing a policy on workplace bullying. In the meantime, can you provide an outline for a private corrective interview with an employee who is said to be a bully? What steps should we take?**

between managers and subordinates are not unusual. They often take years to develop and become habits that are difficult to break. They are comparable to the bickering communication patterns found between spouses, and over time the psychology that influences them can be similar. Still, you may agree that the relationship is valued. Beyond requiring that the quarrelsome behavior stop, establish new rules that must be followed and that will permit orderly discussion of work issues. The requirement that your employee put concerns in writing, for example, or share them only after you are finished speaking, may impose an intervention that produces its own cure. The most important part of your strategy is looking at how you contribute to its perpetuation and wanting change badly enough to follow through. Consider using the EAP for some coaching assistance.

**A relapse could be discovered** through an EAP follow-up interview, by you witnessing the employee's behavior on the job, or even by a third party phoning someone with the bad news. Unfortunately, the desire to prevent or predict relapse by those dealing with substance abusing persons does not lend itself to precise formulas. There are some common denominators, however, that prove helpful in prevention. It is vital that supervisors stay focused on job performance and detach from concerns about what is going on in recovery. If an employee in recovery visits the EAP, the EA professional will motivate the employee to participate in activities that aid recovery and to avoid those things that will impede it. The rest is up to the employee. Relapse can occur suddenly without warning, demonstrated for example by a sudden absence from work. But, relapse can also be secretive, with controlled use of a substance hidden from others for weeks or months.

**Documented complaints** and your personal observations should accompany you to your meeting. Start by explaining what's prompted the meeting, and share what has been observed and reported. Describe the effect of the behavior on morale and productivity. If others have reported they dread anticipated interaction with the alleged bully, let the employee know. This could have a big impact in motivating change. Do not joke or make light of issues in this corrective interview. Doing so will undermine your outcome and perpetuate the problem behavior. State that the behavior can't continue. A bully likes to change the focus and discuss others' personalities and motives. Avoid this discussion, but do ask what your employee thinks about his or her interaction with others. Be patient and listen, but focus on what the employee can do to improve interaction with coworkers. Make an EAP referral. Schedule a specific date and time for a follow-up meeting. Retaliation toward coworkers in response to your meeting is bullying behavior too so make clear your expectation that retaliation will not be tolerated.

## NOTES